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The story of Lucius Krell's wife and Angela Krell's mother is explored in this very special issue.

MAKING ART: I was raised in a family that valued political integrity highly. Childhood memories of my mother's outrage at being asked to sign a "loyalty oath" during the McCarthy era (so she could work in a library, of all places) combined with what she had told me about life in Germany as Hitler rose to power, and i knew that fighting fascism and repression were as important to life as . . . well, as life itself.

As i grew older, i saw a curious contradiction in the area where art intersects with politics. Art (by which i mean all art - drama, literature, dance, painting, poetry and the rest) must be protected always from political repressives who would censor and destroy it because it may lead people into avenues of free thought and fellow-feeling. But the politics of struggle against severe violations of human rights often casts the role of art into doubt: will singing songs really end apartheid in South Africa?

At one time i saw the polarity of art versus struggle as epitomized in the difference between two towns in California – San Francisco (where i was born) and Berkeley (where i was raised).

San Francisco, garbed in many colours – not all of them in the visible spectrum – represented the triumph of art over all . . . and it fell prey to art's lesser known nemesis, not repression but success. Berkeley, land of City Council meetings and student protests, was dangerous in its idealism: people were actually killed over trivialities such as public parks versus parking lots.

I left Berkeley when i couldn't take the tear-gassing anymore, but i didn't move to San Francisco, land of lotus-eaters. Instead i chose to "live" my politics in a quiet environment and make what art i could with my own hands. That course of action kept me busy for a decade, sewing quilts and refusing to vote for military build-ups.

The trouble was, i needed more art in my life than i could make for me. I also needed more ways to work for the betterment of life than just saying "no" to local corruption and graft.

What i needed, and what i finally sought, was involvement with the larger scale arts and entertainments as well as the world arena of human interactions.

All of which leads me to a small transcendent moment in an old rehearsal room above the cracking-plaster decay of the St. Mark's Theatre in New York City a couple of days ago.

Dean's brother Jan Mullaney, former Eclipse Publisher, was at the piano. Sitting next to him were Mary Bracken Phillips, a singer and song-writer, and David Cooper, a singer. They were running through some numbers from the musical Jan and Mary had written, called "Cradle Song." As they worked at their lines and joked over their miscues, i felt a tremendous sense of peaceful well-being. I saw very clearly the similarities between *their* making of a musical and my daily work toward the making of comic books.

What i saw in that moment was the vast linkage of all people who have ever made art, and especially all those whose goals included mass popular entertainment. The work behind the scenes to bring art of any kind before the public, the presentation of the piece in hope that someone who sees it will be aesthetically delighted and even emotionally moved, this is a very fine thing, that's all. It must be protected from dictators and thugs, it must be kept free from the taint of corrupt influence, and it must be open to anyone who wishes to participate.

Making art may be the best thing humans can do. It may also be one of the most political, because it insists on freedom in order to flourish. We need not condemn a governmental system for anything worse than its repression of art to demand its overthrow. Art is freedom and we shall be free.

catherine yronwode

THE SPIRAL PATH™ no. 1, July 1986. Published by Eclipse Comics, P.O. Box 199, Guerneville, CA 95446. Catherine Yronwode, Editor-in-Chief. Dean Mullaney, Publisher. The Spiral Path TM and ©1986 Steve Parkhouse. All other material ©1986 Eclipse Enterprises, Inc. All rights reserved. Film by SM Graphics. Printed in Canada.

the SPIRALPATH

THE LAND OF **TAIRNGIR** HAD BEEN INVADED BY HOSTILE FORCES... AFTER MANY YEARS OF BATTLE, KING GALBRAIN WAS DEPOSED, HIS ARMIES DESTROYED BY MAGIC AND MADNESS. SICK AND DISPIRITED, THE KING AND A HANDFUL OF WARRIORS TOOK FLIGHT AND NOW APPROACHED THE FURTHERMOST BORDERS...

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! WE'LL LOSE THE HORSES IF WE GO ANY FURTHER!
LOOK OUT! YOU ALMOST HAD ME OVER!
WE'LL HAVE TO HEAD FOR HIGHER GROUND!

WRITTEN, ILLUSTRATED AND LETTERED BY:
STEVE PARKHOUSE · GEOFF SENIOR · JOHN RIDGWAY · ANNIE HALFACREE

the Spiral Path

THIS IS USELESS! WE'RE DROWNING LIKE RATS!
WHAT IS IT? WHY DO YOU STOP?
WE'LL STAY HERE UNTIL THE WEATHER BREAKS!
NO, GALBRAIN! WE MUST KEEP GOING ... THIS IS TOO OPEN!
WE'LL FIND SHELTER AND SAFETY IN THE HILLS!
WE SHOULD MAKE A STAND! DECIDE IT HERE AND NOW! WHY CHOOSE A LINGERING DEATH FROM STARVATION WHEN WE CAN DIE QUICKLY IN BATTLE?
WE'RE FINISHED, NUADA ... AND THERE'S NOTHING WE CAN DO TO AVOID IT!
YOU'RE WRONG! WE KEEP RUNNING AND SURVIVE ...
IF WE STOP RUNNING WE'LL DIE!!
WE'RE GOING TO DIE ANYWAY, DAMN YOU! WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE ... EVEN THE WEATHER'S AGAINST US!
HURRY! WHAT'S THE HOLD-UP? WE'VE FOUND THE TRACK ... IT LEADS RIGHT UP TO A ...
THUNK!
GAAAKK!!
STAND TO! WE'LL HAVE TO SHOW OUR HANDS HERE! THEY'RE ALL AROUND US! CONAING! NUADA!

GALBRAIN! THIS WAY... OVER HERE!
WHO CALLS?
HURRY! HURRY ...THIS WAY! FOLLOW ME!

DON'T LISTEN TO THE DRUID! IT'S A TRICK! GALBRAIN!
THERE ARE DEMONS ABROAD! STAND TO!

SUDDENLY, FROM NOWHERE, A SNARLING HORSEMAN APPEARED...
DEATH TO THE LORDS OF LIGHT!
GOD SAVE ME! THE MAGIC OF CORMAC IS UPON US!!

BUT THEN THE STRANGE DRUID STEPPED FORWARD ...AND HURLED A SMALL BLACK SPHERE INTO THE DEMONS' PATH...

AAAGH!
FWAM!

YOUR GENERALS ARE RIGHT, GALBRAIN! IT WOULD BE FOOLHARDY TO ENGAGE CORMAC'S FORCES HERE...
...HIS ARMIES ARE BEWITCHED! THEY KNOW NOTHING OF FEAR...OR MERCY ...YOU WOULD BE MASSACRED ... OR WORSE...

WHO ARE YOU, DRUID?
MY NAME IS RUAD... AND THESE HILLS ARE MY HOME... YOU COULD HIDE OUT HERE FOR MONTHS ... POSSIBLY YEARS ... AS LONG AS YOU KEEP MOVING...
I KNOW A PLACE IN THE MOUNTAINS WHERE YOU CAN SHELTER...
THEN LEAD US TO IT!
THIS WAY... COME... THERE'S NO TIME TO BE LOST!
AND SO GALBRAIN AND HIS LOYAL BAND WERE LED THROUGH MOUNTAIN PASSES AND TWISTED PATHS...
UNTIL...
GREAT GODS, DRUID! WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
IT WAS ONCE AN OLD HILL-DWELLING... LONG ABANDONED. THE HILL IS A MAZE OF MINE-WORKINGS AND TUNNELS...
IT'S THE PERFECT PLACE FOR YOU.
IT PUTS ME IN MIND OF A DREAM... OR A TOMB!

A BLACK SHAPE GLIDED OVERHEAD ON SILENT WINGS...
LOOK! A CROW! THERE'S A BAD OMEN IN IT!
D'YOU HEAR THAT, CAED? YOU'RE A BIRD OF ILL OMEN...
YOU BLACK-HEARTED ROGUE!
ZZZSKKK!
OUT THERE! I SAW THEM IN THE LIGHTNING! WE'VE BEEN FOLLOWED!
DOWN IN THE VALLEY... LOOK!
ZZAPPFFF!
THEY'RE HEADING THIS WAY... THERE'S HUNDREDS OF THEM!
NO, MY FRIEND... YOU'RE LOOKING AT THE ARMIES OF CORMAC, CARADOC AND ARTÛK COMBINED...
AND THEY ARE NUMBERED IN THOUSANDS ... THOUSANDS!!

the SpiralPath

ACROSS THE PLAINS OF TAIRNGIR THEY MARCHED — THE LEGION OF LOST SOULS — DOOMED TO ETERNAL BATTLE FOR THEIR RELIC-KING ARTÛK!
AND ALL WHO STOOD IN THEIR PATH MUST PERISH ... OR ELSE FLY FOR THEIR VERY LIVES!
ARTÛK! LORD OF DEATH, PRINCE OF THE AIR, STEALER OF DREAMLESS SOULS. A TRIUMPH OF DEMENTED WILL OVER DEAD FLESH!
IT'S INSANE! I'M A WARRIOR, CORMAC! I HAVE NO MORE STOMACH FOR NECROMANCY!
YOU PROMISED ME BATTLE WHEN I JOINED YOU ... BATTLE AND THE SPOILS OF WAR!
THERE'LL BE BATTLE ENOUGH WHEN WE CATCH UP WITH GALBRAIN AND HIS GENERALS!
GALBRAIN! ARE WE TO TAKE AN ARMY INTO THE HILLS FOR ONE MAN'S
WHY, GIVE ME SEVEN GOOD MEN AND I'D MOP UP GALBRAIN AND HIS LITTLE BAND IN A MATTER OF DAYS!
ARTÛK WANTS GALBRAIN ALIVE! IT SEEMS HE'S WORTH THE TROUBLE!
TAKE AWAY HIS CROWN AND GALBRAIN'S GUILT LIKE ANY OTHER MAN, MARK MY WORDS!
HE'LL DIE EASILY ENOUGH WITH A SWORD BETWEEN HIS RIBS ... PREFERABLY MINE!
TIME WILL TELL, CARADOC ... TIME WILL TELL!
AND AT THAT MOMENT, KING GALBRAIN HIMSELF, FLEEING BEFORE ARTÛK'S ARMIES, APPROACHED A MOUNTAIN REFUGE ... LED THERE BY A MYSTERIOUS DRUID ...
HOW MANY TRAILS LEAD INTO THIS PLACE, DRUID?
ONLY ONE ... ANY ATTACKING FORCE WOULD HAVE TO APPROACH IN SINGLE FILE ...
UNLESS THEY WERE MOUNTED ON GOATS!

IN THAT CASE IT MAY BE WISE TO POST A REAR-GUARD...
NUADA!
NUADA!
NUADA HAS ALREADY DROPPED BACK, MY LORD... DOWN AT THE EDGE OF THE FOREST...

NUADA... GALBRAITH'S BRAVEST AND MOST LOYAL WARRIOR, PREPARED FOR WHAT HE BELIEVED TO BE HIS FINAL BATTLE...
A PITY IT SHOULD COME TO THIS...
BUT WHAT OTHER WAY CAN A WARRIOR CHOOSE?

THE GODS HAVE BLESSED ME WITH A LONG LIFE...
AND NOW, AFTER FIVE AND TWENTY YEARS I AM READY TO TAKE MY PLACE IN THE HALLS OF PARADISE!

AND SO, THROUGH THE SHORT SUMMER NIGHT NUADA KEPT VIGIL... UNTIL JUST BEFORE DAWN...
FIRE IN THE SKY!! THE SIGNS ARE CLEAR... THE HOUR IS UPON ME!!

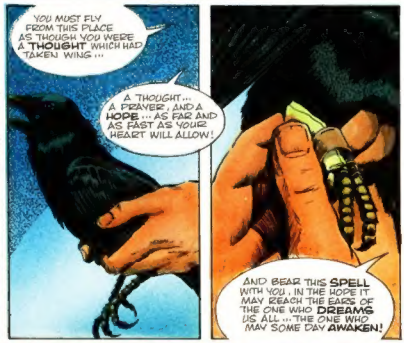
THE THREE FIRE-BOLTS SOARED OVER THE FOREST... PAST THE WATCHFUL EYES OF CONAING, WHO KEPT GUARD AT THE MILL-DWELLING'S ENTRANCE...

THE ATTACK HAD BEGUN!
WHUMF!

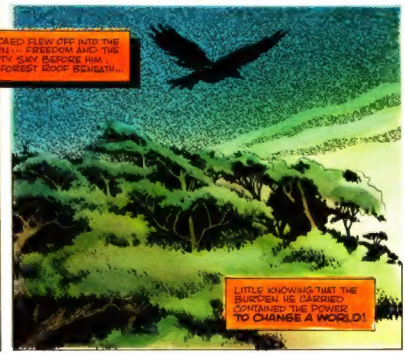
the SPIRALPATH

IN A CHAMBER, DEEP BENEATH THE HILL QUAD HAD SPENT A TROUBLED NIGHT... HIS MIND PLAGUED BY SOMBRE THOUGHTS...
THIS IS THE LAST STAND... THERE IS NOWHERE LEFT TO HIDE. ALL MY EXHORTATIONS TO THE GODS HAVE FAILED!
ARTOK'S SORCERY IS TOO STRONG FOR ME TO OPPOSE... I CAN NO LONGER DEFEND MY KING...
THE TIME HAS COME TO CAST MY FATE TO THE WINDS... COMMIT TO WRITING THAT WHICH HAS BEEN UNSPEAKABLE!!

WE MUST PART COMPANY AT LONG LAST, CAED OLD FRIEND...
YOU ARE THE ONE I HAVE CHOSEN FOR MY LAST ACTION IN THIS WORLD... FOR NOW THE BATTLE MUST CONTINUE IN ANOTHER SPHERE...
...A REALM WHERE GIANTS WALK... AND THE TITANS STILL HOLD SWAY!


YOU MUST FLY FROM THIS PLACE AS THOUGH YOU WERE A THOUGHT WHICH HAD TAKEN WING...
A THOUGHT... A PRAYER, AND A HOPE... AS FAR AND AS FAST AS YOUR HEART WILL ALLOW!
AND BEAR THIS SPELL WITH YOU, IN THE HOPE IT MAY REACH THE EARS OF THE ONE WHO DREAMS US ALL... THE ONE WHO MAY SOME DAY AWAKEN!

GO NOW! FOLLOW YOUR HEART, GIVE NO THOUGHT FOR DIRECTION BUT GO WHERE THE WIND WILLS!
AND I PRAY THAT WE MAY MEET AGAIN IN SOME HAPPIER TIME!


THE CAED FLEW OFF INTO THE DAWN... FREEDOM AND THE EMPTY SKY BEFORE HIM. THE FOREST FAR BENEATH...
LITTLE KNOWING THAT THE BURDEN HE CARRIED CONTAINED THE POWER TO CHANGE A WORLD!

the SPIRALPATH

IN THE FOREST BELOW SMOKE HERE AND THERE STEALTHILY LIKE SHADOWS BETWEEN THE TREES...
THE SCENT OF FEAR HUNG HEAVY ON THE DAWN AIR...

...AND SUDDENLY THE SILENCE WAS SHATTERED BY THE POUNDING OF HOOVES AND A PIERCE BATTLE CRY!
ONE HORSEMAN? THEY'VE SENT OUT ONE HORSEMAN AGAINST US..!
THAT CAN ONLY MEAN ONE THING... THEY'RE MAD! FINISHED!

HIS SWORD HOOVES & SHIELD OF BONE RAIN DOWN A SHOWER OF BLOOD-SOAKED HAMMER-BLOWS!
THE FOREST ECHOES WITH THE SOUND OF CRACKING RIBS AND THE CRIES OF PAIN AND HATE!

THE PATROL SCATTERED... LEAVING ONLY THE HARDIEST TO CONTINUE THE ATTACK... URGED ON BY UNSEEN DEMONIC FORCES. A WARRIOR LEAPT FROM THE BUSHES...

RESOLUTE AS HE WAS, NUADA COULD SCARCELY AVOID THIS FRESH ASSAULT... NOR COULD HE DEFLECT THE CRUEL BLADE THAT DISSECTED HIS SHOULDER!

BUT HE ROLLED CLEAR OF HIS MOUNT AND ON TO HIS FEET IN AN INSTANT. HIS OPPONENTS MADE NO MOVE TO AVOID HIS SCYTHING BLADE!

GIVE UP THIS MADNESS! WHY THROW AWAY YOUR LIVES IN UNEQUAL STRUGGLE?
WHERE IS YOUR CAPTAIN? BRING HIM TO ME SO WE MAY MEET IN SINGLE COMBAT!
THERE'S NO NEED... OUR CAPTAIN IS ALREADY HERE! HE STANDS BEHIND YOU!
GREAT GODS!

WHY DO YOU OPPOSE US, LITTLE WARRIOR? THROW IN YOUR LOT WITH ARTÚR AND KNOW THE JOY OF ETERNAL BATTLE!
NO! I SERVE ONLY GALBRAIN!
THEN I WILL SCATTER YOUR BONES OVER THE FOREST FLOOR... AND LEAVE YOUR FLESH TO FEED THE CROWS!

the Spiralpath

THE FABLED LAND OF TAIRNGIR HAS BEEN INVADED BY THE DEMON-KING ARTÚK AND HIS SOULLESS HORDES... THE KING, GALBRAIN, HAS FLED WITH A HANDFUL OF FAITHFUL WARRIORS TO SEEK SHELTER IN THE HILLS... HIS MOST LOYAL WARRIOR, NUADA, NOW FIGHTS A DESPERATE REARGUARD ACTION...
WHY DO YOU PERSIST IN THIS UNEQUAL STRUGGLE, LITTLE WARRIOR?
BIGGER MEN THAN YOU HAVE FLED AT THE SIGHT OF HAMMERFEST!
YOUR GREAT SIZE MEANS NOTHING TO ME. I WILL STILL DROP YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
WHAT? I... I WHO SLEW THE GREAT OX OF KOHISTAN ... WHO WEAR HIS HORNS STILL BLOODIED IN MY CAP
YOU FEAR ME NOT?
THEN I MUST GIVE THEE CAUSE TO FEAR ME!
AHH... I SEE YOUR HAIR IS LONG...
YOUR HEAD WILL HANG WELL FROM THE RAFTERS IN MY LODGE!
UNNGHH!
MY... SHIELD ARM... IS... BROKEN! I CAN... SCARCELY STAND!
DO NOT CLAIM YOUR TROPHY TOO SOON, HAMMERFEST!
WHILE THERE IS STILL LIFE IN ME... THE FIGHT GOES ON!
AAGHH! I AM STRUCK FROM BEHIND!
THE BLADE BURNS WITH POISON FIRE!

WRITER: STEVE PARKHOUSE ARTISTS: STEVE PARKHOUSE and GEOFF SENIOR

THOK!

AAGHH!!

NUADA'S WARRIOR SOUL DEPARTED HIS BODY... HIS GAZE RESTED BRIEFLY UPON A NEARBY TREE...

...WHERE A SHARP-BEAKED CROW WAS SEATED, AS IF A SPECTATOR TO THE BATTLE BELOW...

WHEN, AT LAST, THE MAN HAVE BEEN ROBBED, SEEMED TO NUADA IN HIS DISEMBODIED STATE THAT THE PAST ACKNOWLEDGED HIS CRIMES WITH A CERTAIN RESPECT...

AND THEN FLAPPED NOISILY AWAY WITH A RAUCOUS CRY...

BUT OTHER EYES WERE WATCHING THE CROW'S FLIGHT WITH MORE THAN PASSING INTEREST...

...NUADA'S SOMEWHAT LIVELY...

A CROW ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE IS NO UNUSUAL THING...

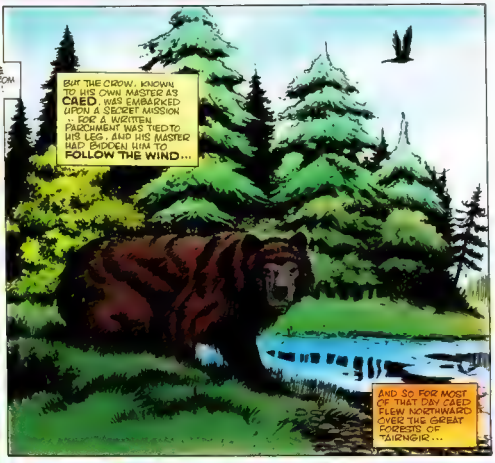
BUT THAT BIRD BEARS A DIFFERENT ASPECT THAT SPEAKS TO ME OF SORCERY!

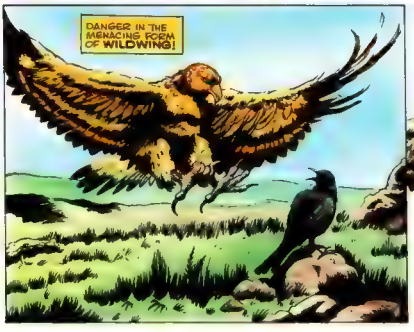
BRING ME WILDWING!

AT ONCE, MASTER!

NOT FOR CORMAC THE MUNDANE PLEASURES OF MERE FALCONRY ... FOR HE NOW RODE FORTH WITH A LIGHT-FLEET GEC EAGLE AT HIS WRIST INTENT ON BRINGING BACK HIS CHOSEN PREY...

the SPIRALPATH


BUT THE CROW, KNOWN TO HIS OWN MASTER AS CAED, WAS EMBARKED UPON A SECRET MISSION ... FOR A WRITTEN PARCHMENT WAS TIED TO HIS LEG, AND HIS MASTER HAD BIDDEN HIM TO FOLLOW THE WIND...
AND SO FOR MOST OF THAT DAY CAED FLEW NORTHWARD OVER THE GREAT FORESTS OF TAIRNGIR...



the Spiralpath

YE GODS! WHAT HAVE I DONE?
I WAS AIMING FOR THE DAMN CROW!
WELL, OLD BIRD... YOU'VE BEEN SPARED FROM A CROW PIE TONIGHT...
WHAT ARE YOU? A MESSENGER FROM THE GODS?
THERE'S A PARCHMENT TIED TO YOUR FOOT!
I MUST TELL FATHER OF THIS. AND QUICKLY!
FATHER! FATHER... WHERE ARE YOU?
I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU! IT'S AN OMEN! A REAL OMEN!
LOOK! LOOK WHAT I'VE FOUND! IT'S WRITING, FATHER! IT MUST BE VERY IMPORTANT!
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S ALL THE HULLABALLO? YOU'RE FRIGHTENING THE CATTLE, CHILD!
WHAT IS IT, FATHER? IS IT A SUMMONS TO BATTLE?
ARE YOU TAKING UP THE SWORD AGAIN?
SHALL I TAKE IT FROM THE SCABBARD AND CLEAN IT, FATHER?

LEAVE ME, CHILD!
BUT, FATHER.. WHAT ABOUT THE CROW? I BROUGHT HIM IN MY JERKIN ESPECIALLY FOR YOU TO SEE....
CAGE HIM... AND SPEAK OF THIS TO NO-ONE!

AND SO...
DON'T YOU LOOK SO PLEASED WITH YOURSELF, OLD MAN CROW.
YOU MAY STILL END UP IN A PIE!

AND LATER THAT NIGHT...
WHAT WAS IT FATHER? WHAT WAS WRITTEN ON THE PARCHMENT?
I STILL DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND.... IT'S PARTLY A MESSAGE FROM MY OLD FRIEND RUAD...
AND PARTLY A SPELL...
BUT HOW IT ARRIVED HERE... ONLY THE GODS KNOW!
THE BIRD BROUGHT IT, FATHER!

THAT'S NO BIRD... AT LEAST NO ORDINARY BIRD!
LISTEN TO THIS: "THE BEARER OF THIS SPELL WAS ONCE A GREAT WARRIOR, HIS SOUL TRANSFORMED BY THE SORCERY OF THE NECROMANCER, ARTÓK!"
THE SPELL IS TO UNBIND HIM... AND REVEAL HIS QUEST TO SAVE OUR LAND!

TO UTTER THE WORDS THAT RELEASE HIM WILL ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF ARTÓK AND NOT ONLY INCUR HIS WRATH... BUT ALSO HIS RETRIBUTION!
TO IGNORE IT MEANS THAT TAIRNGIR, AND ALL ITS PEOPLE, ARE DOOMED!
YOU HAVE NO CHOICE, FATHER!..

I KNOW, CHILD... I MUST DO WHAT RUAD ASKS.
THE WORDS MUST BE SPOKEN!

the SPIRALPATH

AND SO, OVER THE NEXT FEW DAYS, EVERYTHING WAS MADE READY
AND WHEN THE TIME WAS RIGHT, THE PRONOUNCEMENT WAS MADE!
THE OLD WARRIOR-DRUID RETIRED TO AWAIT THE OUTCOME...
AND ON THE MORNING OF THE NIGHT OF THE LAST FULL MOON, THE GIRL, BETHBARA DISCERNED A SHAPE MOVING IN THE DARKNESS OF THE HUT!
FATHER! COME QUICKLY! SOMETHING'S HAPPENED!
BUT HER FATHER HAD FELT A DEEPER CHILL THAN THAT OF APPROACHING AUTUMN!...

FOR IN HIS MIND'S-EYE A VISION WAS GROWING... EXPANDING TO FILL HIS MIND WITH THE PROMISE OF UNTOLD HORRORS TO COME...
AND THROUGHOUT, A SINGLE WORD BURNED... LIKE A BEACON LIGHTING THE PATHWAYS OF HELL...
AND THE WORD WAS:
ARTÛK

NEXT: THE DARK DREAMER!

BY THE GODS! ARTÚK HIMSELF HAS COME BEFORE ME!
HE WOULD CONSUME MY BEING! DRAG ME TO HELL!
BETHBARA! HELP ME... FOR PITY'S SAKE!
BUT HOW, FATHER? WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?
MY SWORD! IN THE HOUSE... FETCH IT QUICKLY!
I AM POSSESSED!
BUT BEFORE SHE COULD REACH THE DOOR, IT HAD OPENED... REVEALING A BLACK-CLAD FIGURE, WITH A FACE AS GAUNT AND BITTER AS A WINTER TREE.
OHHH!

IN SILENCE, THE MAN IN BLACK APPROACHED MADOC ... HIS HAND WOVE A MESSAGE IN THE FABRIC OF THE AIR ...
YOU! YOU RANCID SON OF A COW! YOU WORM-RIDDEN DUNG-HEAP! YOU DARE TO MAKE THE SIGN OF HORNS TO ME?
I'LL CUT OUT YOUR LIVER AND ROAST IT IN HELLFIRE!
SHOW YOURSELF, ARTOK... DON'T HIDE BEHIND THIS GOOD MAN'S FACE...
SHOW YOURSELF FOR THE BITCH-BORN BAG OF BONES YOU REALLY ARE!
COME HERE, CHILD! BRING ME THE SWORD I ASKED YOU FOR!
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM... IT'S NOT YOUR FATHER TALKING!
SHE DOESN'T HAVE THE SWORD, ARTOK..
I HAVE!
YOU BETRAYED ME! I'LL TAKE THE LIFE FROM YOU WITH MY BARE HANDS!

the SPIRALPATH

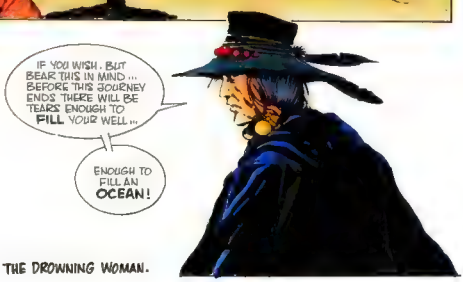
IT WAS ALL OVER IN A SECOND... A LIGHTNING BLOW...
THE LIFELESS CORPSE STUMBLED A FEW, FALTERING STEPS... AND IN DEATH, REVEALED ITS DREADFUL BURDEN!
WITH AN AGONISED SHRIEK, THE SORCERER LEAPT HIGH INTO THE AIR... AND VANISHED INTO A LOWERING SKY...
LEAVING THE HUSK OF MADOC TO FALL TO THE GROUND...
MAY THE GODS HAVE MERCY ON ME...
I HAVE SLAIN MY SAVIOUR.
BESIDE A SMALL WOOD THE MAN CALLED CAED DUG A SHALLOW GRAVE...
AND THERE HE BURIED THE BRAVE DRUID.
AND AT THE LAST STONE WAS PLACED..
SEEK THE CAVE OF THE ORACLE, CAED ... BEYOND THE PERILOUS FOREST...
MASTER?
MASTER.. IS THAT YOUR ROAD?
SEEK THE CAVE OF THE ORACLE...

the SPIRALPATH

WITH THAT, THE VISION FADED... CAED RETURNED TO THE CAIRN TO FIND A GRIEVING BETHBARA...
MY FATHER IS DEAD. ISN'T HE? YOU KILLED HIM!
I HAD TO, CHILD... I HAD TO RELEASE HIS HOLD ON LIFE...
SO THAT HIS SOUL MIGHT ESCAPE!

WHO ARE YOU? ARE YOU THE CROW-MAN? WHAT DO YOU WANT HERE?
HERE? NOTHING.
THIS IS WHERE ONE JOURNEY ENDS AND ANOTHER BEGINS.
TELL ME... DO YOU KNOW OF THE PERILOUS FOREST?

YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE! YOU HAVE EMPTIED MY LIFE AT A STROKE...
I AM. A WELL THAT'S RUN DRY... I CAN'T EVEN WEEP!
AT LEAST LET ME COME WITH YOU... GIVE ME A FEW MOMENTS AT MY FATHER'S SIDE, THEN LET ME COME WITH YOU..
PLEASE!

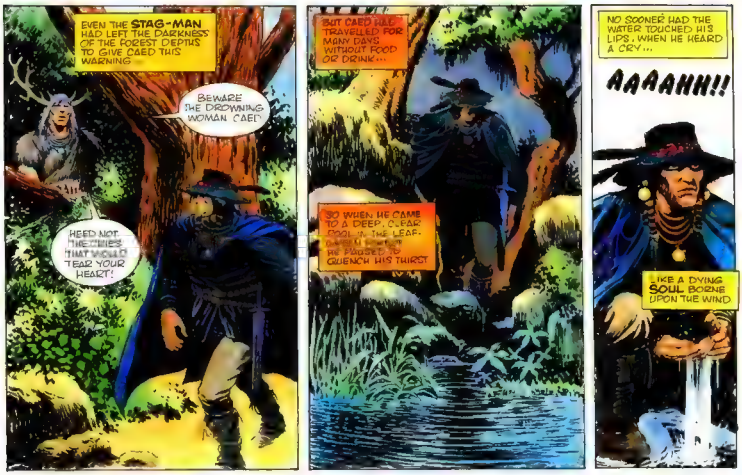

IF YOU WISH. BUT BEAR THIS IN MIND... BEFORE THIS JOURNEY ENDS THERE WILL BE TEARS ENOUGH TO FILL YOUR WELL...
ENOUGH TO FILL AN OCEAN!

NEXT: THE DROWNING WOMAN.

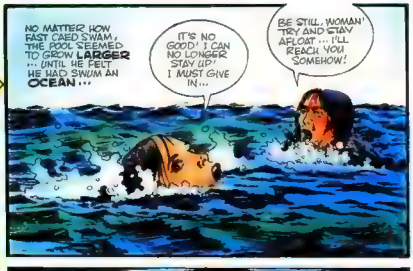
CAED HAD LEFT HIS YOUNG COMPANION, BETHBARA ... AND HAD COME TO THE EDGE OF THE PERILOUS FOREST ... LEGEND HAS IT THAT THE UNWARY TRAVELLER MAY WANDER FOREVER AMONG ITS SECRET PATHS ...
BUT THE BIRDS OF THE FOREST HAD ANOTHER WARNING FOR CAED ...
BEWARE THE DROWNING WOMAN, CAED!
IF YOU HEAR A CRY ... TAKE NO HEED, BUT PASS ON YOUR WAY!
THE ANIMALS ALSO FELT MOVED TO UTTER A WARNING ...
BEWARE THE DROWNING WOMAN, CAED!
DO NOT DRINK FROM THE POOL OF FORGETFULNESS!

the DROWNING WOMAN

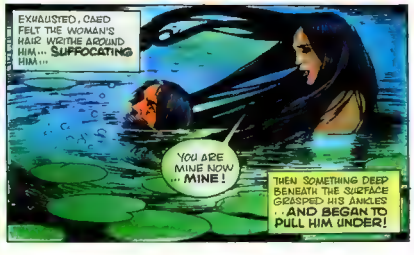
STORY AND ART : STEVE PARKHOUSE


EVEN THE STAG-MAN HAD LEFT THE DARKNESS OF THE FOREST DEPTHS TO GIVE CAED THIS WARNING ...
BEWARE THE DROWNING WOMAN CAED!
HEED NOT THE CRIES THAT WOULD TEAR YOUR HEART!
BUT CAED HAD TRAVELLED FOR MANY DAYS WITHOUT FOOD OR DRINK ...
SO WHEN HE CAME TO A DEEP, CLEAR POOL IN THE LEAF-DARKENED DEPTHS HE PAUSED TO QUENCH HIS THIRST
NO SOONER HAD THE WATER TOUCHED HIS LIPS, WHEN HE HEARD A CRY ...
AAAAHH!!
LIKE A DYING SOUL BORNE UPON THE WIND

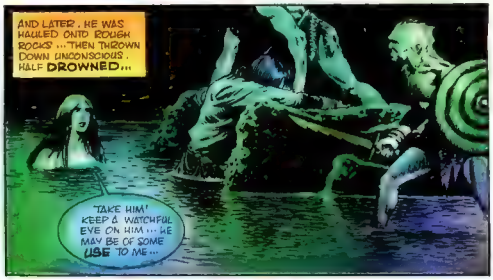
the SPIRALPATH


NO MATTER HOW FAST CAED SWAM, THE POOL SEEMED TO GROW LARGER ... UNTIL HE FELT HE HAD SWUM AN OCEAN...
IT'S NO GOOD! I CAN NO LONGER STAY UP! I MUST GIVE IN...
BE STILL, WOMAN! TRY AND STAY AFLOAT ... I'LL REACH YOU SOMEHOW!

AND AS HE REACHED HER...
YOU FOOL! YOU HAD TO DO IT. DIDN'T YOU! YOU HAD TO PROVE HOW BRAVE YOU ARE ... HOW NOBLE!
WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU DOING, WOMAN?

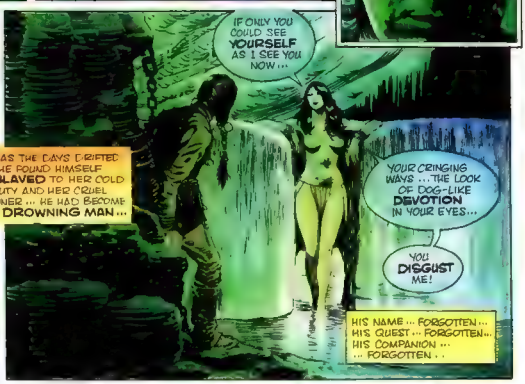

EXHAUSTED, CAED FELT THE WOMAN'S HAIR WRITHE AROUND HIM ... SUFFOCATING HIM...
YOU ARE MINE NOW ... MINE!
THEN SOMETHING DEEP BENEATH THE SURFACE GRASPED HIS ANKLES ... AND BEGAN TO PULL HIM UNDER!

the SPIRALPATH


AND LATER, HE WAS HAULED ONTO ROUGH ROCKS ... THEN THROWN DOWN UNCONSCIOUS, HALF DROWNED...
"TAKE HIM! KEEP A WATCHFUL EYE ON HIM ... HE MAY BE OF SOME USE TO ME ..."

WHEN HE CAME TO, HE FOUND HIMSELF IN A VAST UNDERGROUND CAVERN.
DARK, DANK, AND AS COLD AS DEATH.
SO COLD THAT NO THOUGHTS BURNED IN HIS BRAIN ... NO QUESTIONS.

SEE THE WAY HE LOOKS AT US ... ALWAYS STARING AT US FROM THE SHADOWS.
LIKE SOME KIND OF ANIMAL!
HE ONLY HAD THOUGHT FOR THE WOMAN ... THE BEAUTIFUL DROWNING WOMAN AND HER HANDMAIDENS ..


AND AS THE DAYS DRIFTED BY, HE FOUND HIMSELF ENSLAVED TO HER COLD BEAUTY AND HER CRUEL MANNER ... HE HAD BECOME THE DROWNING MAN...
IF ONLY YOU COULD SEE YOURSELF AS I SEE YOU NOW ...
YOUR CRINGING WAYS ... THE LOOK OF DOG-LIKE DEVOTION IN YOUR EYES...
YOU DISGUST ME!
HIS NAME ... FORGOTTEN... HIS QUEST ... FORGOTTEN... HIS COMPANION ... FORGOTTEN ...

the Spiralpath

IN THE FOREST ABOVE, BETHBARA WANDERED AIMLESSLY ... DESPAIR WELLING UP INSIDE HER...
CAED! WHERE ARE YOU? CAN YOU HEAR ME, CAED?
ANSWER ME... PLEASE ANSWER ME!

I DON'T WANT TO WANDER HERE FOR EVER...
OH, CAED PLEASE.
GIVING IN TO HER TEARS, BETHBARA STUMBLED ALONG THE FOREST PATH ... AND SLUMPED BESIDE A MOSS-COVERED ROCK...
CAED... PLEASE HELP ME, CAED..
AND AS SHE WEPT, HER TEARS MINGLED WITH THE WATERS OF A PURE WOODLAND STREAM...
WHICH CARRIED THEM DOWN TO A DEEP, DARK POOL...

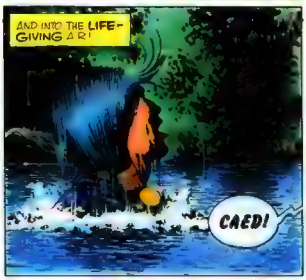
HIS MIND SEEMED TO CLEAR, AS IF AWAKING FROM A DREAM... THE CHAINS AT HIS WRISTS FELL AWAY, GIVING HIM PAUSE TO THINK...
PERHAPS THERE WERE NO CHAINS... EXCEPT IN MY MIND!

AND WITH THAT THOUGHT, CAED RESORTED TO THE MOST COMMON TACTIC OF ALL WARRIORS...
HE RAN!
YOU FOOL! YOU CANNOT RUN FROM ME! I WILL BE WITH YOU ALWAYS!

SNATCHING UP A BROKEN STALACTITE, CAED SWUNG OUT AT HIS ASSAILANT'S...
PUNKH!

SUDDENLY, A GULF YAWNED BEFORE HIM... HE PITCHED FORWARD INTO SPACE.
A GUNT OF WATER CAUGHT HIS EYE AND HE KICKED OUT AGAINST A ROCK.

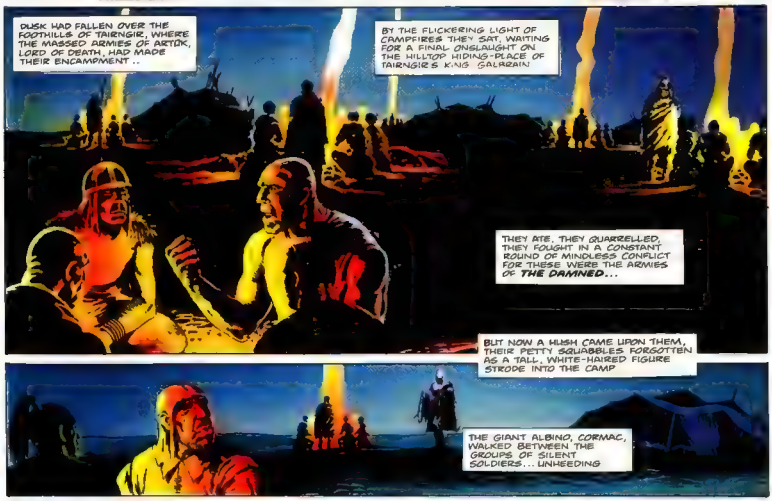
A POWERFUL CURRENT TOOK HOLD OF HIM... WHIRLING HIM DOWN INTO THE DARK WATERS.
THROUGH FLOODED PASSAGES, UP THROUGH THE HOLE IN THE BED OF THE POOL...


AND INTO THE LIFE-GIVING AIR!
CAED!

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN? I'VE BEEN WANDERING IN THE FOREST FOR DAYS!
I THOUGHT I'D LOST YOU! I WAS CALLING OUT FOR YOU...
SO, IT WAS YOUR VOICE I HEARD!
I CRIED LIKE A BABY... I COULDN'T HELP IT!
THANK THE GODS, BETHDARA... YOU SAVED MY LIFE!

I [illegible] WAS BEYOND HELP... BUT YOU BROUGHT ME BACK...
IT WAS YOU WHO BROKE THE STILL!
FROM NOW ON, WHATEVER WE FACE... WE FACE TOGETHER!
SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
I WISH I KNEW, GIRL... I WISH THE HELL I KNEW!

the SPIRALPATH


DUSK HAD FALLEN OVER THE FOOTHILLS OF TAIRNGIR, WHERE THE MASSED ARMIES OF AETOK, LORD OF DEATH, HAD MADE THEIR ENCAMPMENT..
BY THE FLICKERING LIGHT OF CAMPFIRES THEY SAT, WAITING FOR A FINAL ONSLAUGHT ON THE HILLTOP HIDING-PLACE OF TAIRNGIR'S KING GALBRAIN
THEY ATE, THEY QUARRELLED, THEY FOUGHT IN A CONSTANT ROUND OF MINDLESS CONFLICT FOR THESE WERE THE ARMIES OF THE DAMNED...
BUT NOW A HUSH CAME UPON THEM, THEIR PETTY SQUABBLES FORGOTTEN AS A TALL, WHITE-HAIRED FIGURE STRODE INTO THE CAMP
THE GIANT ALBINO, CORMAC, WALKED BETWEEN THE GROUPS OF SILENT SOLDIERS... UNHEEDING

THE BURDEN HE CARRIED APPEARED TO WEIGH VERY LITTLE... AND AT FIRST GLANCE MAY HAVE SEEMED MERELY THE ANCIENT HUSK OF A HUMAN CORPSE...
EXCEPT FOR THE ATMOSPHERE OF SUPPRESSED POWER THAT EMANATED FROM THE RAGGED BUNDLE AND THE CHILL THAT PRECEDED THEM BOTH, DIMMING EVEN THE WARM GLOW OF CRACKLING FIRES.
SO THAT CARADOC, WARRIOR CHIEFTAIN AND ALLY OF CORMAC, FELT COMPELLED TO SPEAK IN LOWERED TONES...
WHAT'S CORMAC PLAYING AT? HE SPENDS MORE TIME WITH THAT CADAVER THAN WITH HIS OWN MEN!
WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW IS WHY HAVEN'T WE ATTACKED GALBRAIN'S POSITION IN STRENGTH?
WE JUST SIT HERE WAITING WHILE CORMAC PLAYS WITH HIS BONES LIKE SOME TOOTHLESS PUP!
BRING ME THE NATIVE, OWEN!

the Spiralpath

WITH THAT, CORMAC STRODE AWAY LEAVING THE WOMAN, OLWEN, WIDE-EYED IN THE DARKENED TENT..
SNIFF! SNIFF!
SHE HEARD A THIN, RATTLING WHEEZE FROM THE CORNER WHERE THE SHADOWS LAY HEAVY... AND HER NOSTRILS CAUGHT THE UNMISTAKEABLE SMELL OF DECAY..

INTO THE HALF-LIGHT CRAWLED A FIGURE FROM THE REALM OF NIGHT. A HUGE, BLEACHED SPIDER. THE SPECTRE OF DEATH, LORD ARTOK HIMSELF... ANIMATED BY HIS UNSPEAKABLE NEED
SPEECHLESS WITH TERROR, OLWEN FELT HER MIND RECEDING INTO A WELL OF DARKNESS... HER SOUL TEETERED ON THE BRINK OF A BLACK, BOTTOMLESS ABYSS.

AND AS SHE FELL, HER BODY FOUND ITS VOICE
AAAHHH!!
THE SOLDIERS, IN THE DEPTHS OF THEIR WILDERNESS, DREW THEIR CLOAKS AND MOVED CLOSER TO THEIR FIRES
EACH MAN COWED, AND SECRETLY SHAMED, BY THE MERCILESS POWER OF HIS HORRENDOUS MONARCH.

the SPIRALPATH

DAWN THE COLD NIGHT HAD FLED AS A POWERFUL FIGURE DESCENDED FROM THE GRASSY SLOPES OF TAIENGIE'S MOUNTAINS.
RUAD KING GALBRAIN'S GUIDE AND PROTECTOR, LAST IN A LONG LINE OF WARRIOR DRUIDS.
RUAD, WHOSE SPECIAL TOTEM WAS THE CROW. WHOSE POWER HAD TRANSFORMED SUCH A BIRD INTO THE WARRIOR KNOWN AS..
CAED! EVERY TIME I SEE A CROW I THINK OF CAED
I THINK OF NOTHING ELSE!
RUAD'S THOUGHTS FLEW ON FLIGHTED WINGS, ACROSS THE LAND TO THE EDGE OF A DISTANT FOREST WHERE CAED AND HIS COMPANION, BETHBARA LAY
CAED! WHAT IS IT?
SOMETHING WOKE ME. A SOUND, A THOUGHT. SOMETHING IN THE AIR.
CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?
BETHBARA! YOUR BOW QUICKLY!
SOMETHING APPROACHES US!

BUT RUAD'S THOUGHTS DID NOT LINGER UNDULY FOR HE NOW FACED PERILS OF HIS OWN IN THE SHAPE OF ARTIN'S SENTRIES

IT'S ONE OF GALBRAIN'S! GO GET HIM! I'LL FLANK HIM!

WITHOUT PAUSING IN HIS PURPOSEFUL STRIDE, RUAD DREW A GLITTERING BLADE... HIDDEN IN HIS STAFF.
SSSSKKKK!

CLANGG!

BLATT!

SHONK
aah!

IN LESS THAN A HEARTBEAT THE DRUID HAD DESPATCHED THE TWO SENTRIES AND WALKED ON INTO THE VALLEY THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW...
RUN AND TELL CORMAC WE'VE GOT A VISITOR AN UNEXPECTED GUEST!
EXPECT 'E ALREADY KNOWS 'E SEEMS TO KNOW EVERTHING ELSE THAT GOES ON 'ERE!

the SPIRALPATH

WHERE D'YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING? NOBODY GETS PAST THIS POINT WITHOUT DEALING WITH ME
THEM'S ORDERS. SO SPEAK UP!
BUT RUAD SAID NOTHING. HIS BLADE FAR MORE ELOQUENT THAN WORDS..
YOU'RE A FOOL, DRUID! WHAT CAN YOU GAIN BY THIS? YOUR POWER HAS WANED, ONLY YOUR SWORD SKILL IS LEFT
PERHAPS THAT'S ALL I NEED, CORMAC. AND PERHAPS NOT EVEN THAT.
AAAAH!
AS RUAD FELL, SOMETHING BROKE IN CAED'S MIND... HE TOPPLED FORWARD IN A DEAD FAINT.
CAED?
CAED. GET UP! THEY'RE MOVING IN! GET UP, CAED GET UP, DAMN YOU!

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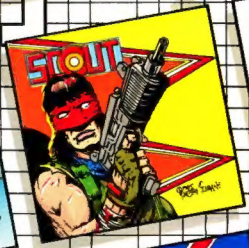

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